

16th Sunday (B)

- Recently I received the following email entitled: "Amber light".
- *"The light turned yellow, just in front of him. He did the right thing & stopped at the intersection, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through it; the tailgating woman behind him was furious & honked her horn, screaming in frustration, as she missed her chance to get through the intersection. As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window & looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. He ordered her to exit her car with her hands up. He cuffed her & took her to the police station where she was searched, fingerprinted, photographed & placed in a holding cell.*
- *After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell & opened the door; she was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.*
- *He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, giving the guy in front of you the finger & yelling abuse at him. I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker, the 'Choose Life' license plate holder, the 'Follow Me to Church on Sunday' bumper sticker, & the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the boot, so naturally I assumed you had stolen the car."*
- We can all behave quite terribly when under pressure in ways that are out of character from our normal ways of behaving.
- Fifty years ago the word 'stress' was only ever applied to materials like steel & the wings of planes, but since then, along with 'pressure', it has first crept into our language & more lately become an everyday term associated with human psychology.
- Perhaps it's the ever-growing pace of life or an innate competitiveness but pressure & stress have become part of daily life for most people in our times.
- Although he may never have used the words 'stress' or 'pressure', Jesus knew all about the demands of ministering to people.
- When the disciples returned from their first efforts away from Jesus he knew that they needed some time out to debrief, to pray & to re-energise themselves; he ordered them all into a boat & they headed for a lonely place where they could be by themselves & rejuvenate.
- Jesus recognised the importance of taking time out.
- If you are engaged in work that sees you meeting the needs of others, you need some time out to reflect on your experiences; time to hold those people up to God in prayer; time to make sense of your work & the interactions you've shared; time to simply recharge your batteries so that you can once again give fully of yourself.
- Unfortunately, when Jesus arranged for himself & the disciples to have some time out, the crowd anticipated where they were going & actually beat them there! When the disciples arrived at their lonely spot, they were once again overwhelmed by the crowd.
- However, Jesus recognised the demands of the crowd as being more urgent than the demands of the disciples & himself.
- He took pity on them, was moved by compassion & responded to their need.

- The demands on people's lives can be great today; the eight-hour day seems to be a thing of the past; some people working more than 60 hours a week; they take work home & work on the weekends.
- An additional stress in these times with COVID is the effects that lockdowns have on the economy & businesses.
- We know from surveys that they eat out most of the time, they party hard when they get the chance, & that Sunday is spent on the home front, going to the gym or sleeping; then on Monday they start the process again.
- Two things drive this obsessive work practice: competition in the job market, & the financial bonuses offered to the employees.
- The problem is that this practice cannot be a long-term strategy.
- At the other end of the scale we all know people, only in their 30s & 40s, who are burnt out & feel used by a ruthless commercial market-place.
- This culture of exhaustion is not confined to the young corporate raiders; most people in our country have never worked as hard, with so many claims on their time & energies.
- To add to the confusion & injustice of all of this is that there are so many who are capable & wanting to work, but for a variety of reasons cannot do so & therein lies **their** stress.
- Excessive demands on one's time, no matter how great the needs & rewards, were issues for Jesus & the Apostles as well.
- Jesus' call to 'come away to some lonely place all by yourselves & rest for a while' is not just about good work practices & ethical employment policy.
- It is about humanising our work, making sense of what we do & seeing our work as means to an end, not an end in itself.
- Our work should give us a sense of dignity & worth.
- Mark tells us today that though Jesus was moved to compassion by the needs of the crowd, he also knew that their needs were not the only ones that had to be met - Jesus teaches his disciples & us that the balance between work & rest is an obligation of faith.
- So this Sunday's Gospel carries a critical message for the modern world.
- Rest, recreation & leisure are not indulgences about which we should feel guilty - they are rights defended by Christ & protect our human dignity.
- May you recognise the MORE in life that beckons good recreation & a focus on building and maintaining your important relationships.
- Going back to the Amber Light story, another side of the story challenges our behaviour - One day we will all have to give an account of ourselves as to how we see & treat others, especially those who are leaving the churches, perhaps because they are not hearing the Good News being spread among us, & because our speeches, official communications & declarations have become meaningless for them.
- Ordinary people are disappointed in us because they don't see in us the compassion of Jesus or how to meet a more human God than the one they perceive in our behaviour.